BLACKFOOT SWAN LRP APPROACH DECISION RATIONALE AND TALKING POINTS

9/7/2016

DECISION MADE

The seven Southwestern Crown Line Officers have directed the Blackfoot Swan Landscape Restoration interdisciplinary team (Team) to adopt and adapt the photo interpretation approach used on the Okanagan-Wenatchee National Forest to address successional patches and landscape patterns, as well as composition and structure for their project.

Open SIMPPLLE 1.3 may be used by the team, in conjunction with photo interpretation, as they deem appropriate, to add efficiencies to their work.

FULL SUPPORT

We expect the team, our district and forest staffs and regional specialists to provide support and contribute to the success of this project.

RATIONALE

PURPOSE OF PROJECT

Our decision will help advance both primary purposes of this project, reduce risk from uncharacteristic wildfire and conserve terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity. Advancing toward the conservation of biodiversity is a new project specific intent for the region. While Forest Plans establish the framework for this work through programmatic NEPA, BSLRP will identify and analyze specific treatments for an implementable decision.

BEST CURRENT SCIENCE

- The science supporting the ecological importance of landscape scale structure, function, pattern and process is clear. **Successional spatial patterns**, influenced by disturbance factors influences many ecologically important **processes**.
- Photo interpretation of pattern, composition and structure metrics is currently used, albeit at a smaller scale, on the Okanagan-Wenatchee National Forest, for projects **through implementation**. This approach has been tested for over 20 years with numerous scientific publications using an established approach.
- The team was instructed to look for new and innovative means to plan and implement work at a scale commensurate with the disturbance factors of today and projected into the future and they have identified a tested tool to do so.
- VMAP and SIMPPLLE have been used for this project and will continue to be valuable. Open SIMPPLLE 1.3 may be instrumental in adding efficiencies to the photo interpretation approach, but it will not replace photo interpretation for this project.
- Photo interpretation will allow us to compare historic, current and future successional patch metrics.
- Polygons produced by VMap represent patches of similar vegetation types – not successional patches.

MOST EFFICIENT APPROACH

- The spatial analysis process for this approach is documented. We will scale the existing process up to the 1.3 million acres. Using a tool already implemented on several projects is more efficient than designing a new one.
- The team will strategize to scale up the photo interpretation process as efficiently as possible and implement quality control measures. Partners, such as The Nature Conservancy and the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Coalition my increase our capacities.
- We believe having empirical data, through aerial photos, will aid in treatment planning, analysis and implementation and will facilitate and inform our decision without the need for subsequent NEPA.

COST EFFECTIVE

- We believe the upfront investment will save costs in the long term.
- Estimated planning cost/acre of vegetation treatment with the photo interpretation approach is less than $100/per acre of vegetation treatment. This is more efficient than 2013 estimated Region 1 planning costs of $2,000 per acre treated.
- An advantage of the photo interpretation approach is the ability to directly identify polygons for treatment in the proposed action which is key to gaining cost efficiencies in both the analysis and implementation of the project

PROVEN APPROACH FOR COLLABORATION AND TRANSPARENCY

- Partners support this process in Region 6 and liked the tangible way in which they could engage in the process. TNC has taken a leadership role in its use and promotion
- "The ability to tell the story of why and how the landscape is in its current state, and why we've determined a particular future state for the landscape, is extremely important. The value of educating our stakeholders, our investors, the public, and our collaborators… that value is priceless." (James Dickinson, R6 Landscape Ecologist)

INNOVATIONS AND OUT-OF-THE-BOX THINKING

- The Region and Forest Supervisors want to try new things. We want to test new applications. Products of this process will be the learning in and of itself, which will be documented in lessons learned.
- We acknowledge and will disclose any limitations to our approach, and we need to move forward. This is the approach we have directed the Team to use.

CHIP WEBER, FOREST SUPERVISOR, FLATHEAD NATIONAL FOREST

TIMOTHY GARCIA, FOREST SUPERVISOR, LOLO NATIONAL FOREST

BILL AVEY, FOREST SUPERVISOR, HELENA-LEWIS & CLARK NATIONAL FORESTS